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AUTHOR Kraska, Marie F.
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ABSTRACT

A study compared the perceptions of work and work value orientations of high school students enrolled in the first year of a vocational education programs. Three hundred eight students were compared on the basis of gender, ethnic group, and academic status (disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged). Two hundred were from two small rural southern area vocational centers; 108 were from 2 large southern metropolitan area vocational centers. Guidance counselors administered the Meaning and Value of Work Scale (MVWS) and returned raw data for analysis. The multivariate analysis of variance statistical procedure was applied to the three independent variables (gender, ethnic group, and academic status) and two dependent variables--scores on Part I of the MVWS (meaning of work) and scores on Part II (value of work). Females scored significantly higher than males on the meaning and value of work. Females held more positive attitudes toward the meaning and value of work than did males. Ethnic group was a significant source for meaning of work; black students had the larger mean, indicating a broader perception of work than white students. No significant differences resulted from the comparison between disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged students. (A list of 16 references and 2 tables are appended.) (Author/YLB)

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Work Values of High School Vocational Education Students

Marie F. Kraska

Auburn University

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Running Head: MEANING AND VALUE OF WORK

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare the perceptions of work and work value orientations of high school students enrolled in their first year of a vocational education program. Three hundred and eight students were compared on the basis of gender, ethnic group, and academic status (disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged). Guidance counselors administered the Meaning and Value of Work Scale to students in four different area vocational centers. The multivariate analysis of variance statistical procedure was applied to the three independent and two dependent variables. Results indicated females scored significantly higher than males on the meaning and value of work. Females held more positive values toward the meaning and value of work than did males. Statistically significant differences between comparison groups were found; however, school personnel should exercise caution when interpreting scores on the Meaning and Value of Work Scale.

Marie F. Kraska, Assistant Professor, Trade and Industrial Education, Center for Vocational and Adult Education, Auburn University, AL (205) 844-3400.

Work Values of High School Vocational Education Students

Rapid expansion from local manufacturing and agricultural markets to a global, information-based economy is making new demands on the Nation's workforce. These demands will emphasize mental as well as technological requirements needed for new and developing jobs. Naylor (1988) stated that workers of the future must be equipped with attitudes and behaviors consistent with those of employers. In addition, employers expect workers to possess desirable worker attributes prior to employment. Owens and Monthey (1983) reported that employers seek employees who are enthusiastic, responsible, cooperative and willing to learn. Workers with deficiencies in these attitudes and behaviors often face difficulty in gaining entry into the labor market. Such attitudes and behaviors along with higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills have been collectively termed "vocational ethics." Work values are part of the broader term "vocational ethics", and include an individual's beliefs, attitudes and behaviors which affect and contribute to the guiding principles and overall values of the workplace. Changing attitudes about work and the work environment contribute to self-sufficiency, productivity, and independent living, rather than life-long dependency (Elder, 1988).

Petty (1983) found that maintenance/repair workers scored significantly lower on ambition and conscientiousness than did workers in the metal working trades. Workers in the construction trades scored significantly higher on self-control than those in

metalworking and maintenance/repair. Supervisors scored significantly higher than workers on self-control, enthusiasm, and conscientiousness.

Petty, Kazanas, and Eastman (1981) found that worker expectations of affective work competencies were lower than those of supervisors. Miller and Usoro (1981) found that students scored significantly lower than prospective employers on the Affective Work Competencies Inventory. On the other hand, Coates (1982) reported that worker aspirations are for participation and interest in higher quality jobs that provide personal satisfaction.

The necessity to perceive work in a positive and meaningful way is central to one's personal and occupational success. Miller and Usoro (1981) stated that most individuals deal with job requirements by habit from other previously learned behaviors developed in their home and in their early school years. This recent emphasis on work values is prompting vocational education to prepare students for job requirements beyond the technical or manual skills level. For example, punctuality, reliability, honesty, and other personal traits that assist individuals to obtain and maintain employment are emphasized in work-based programs such as the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) (Useem, 1987).

As the job market becomes increasingly technology oriented and competition grows more keen, studies of work values are important. Such studies can provide reliable information about

perceptions of work and work value orientations of high school students so that they (as individuals), their communities, and the nation as a whole may achieve potential rewards and benefits of a successful labor force. Buck and Barrick (1987) contended that personal values, relations with others, maturity, and commitment to a job are key factors leading to successful employment. Furthermore, Buck and Barrick (1987) stated that the mastery of such values can be taught and such mastery will lead to positive changes in behavior. In order for vocational education to develop desirable work values in students, it is necessary to assess existing work values and perceptions. It should be further ascertained whether these values and perceptions differ by gender, race, disadvantaged- nondisadvantaged conditions so that appropriate instruction may be directed toward the needs of each group. The limited amount of information regarding the perceptions of work and the work values of male and female, black and white, and disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged high school students is the problem that provided the focal point for this investigation.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to compare differences in perceptions of work and work value orientations of high school students enrolled in their first year of a vocational education program. More specifically, the study attempted to answer the following research question.

For high school students, to what extent are there differences (a) in perceptions of work and (b) work value orientations based on gender (male and female), ethnic group (black and white), and academic status (disadvantaged or nondisadvantaged)?

Method

Sample

Subjects for this study consisted of a total of 308 high school students enrolled in their first year of a vocational education program. Two hundred students were from two small rural southern area vocational centers, and 108 were from two large southern metropolitan area vocational centers. Subjects were selected from both rural and metropolitan area vocational centers to enhance the representativeness of the population to increase the generalizability of the findings. Guidance counselors at the respective schools administered the Meaning and Value of Work Scale (MVWS) and returned the raw data for analysis. Counselors read the instructions aloud and instructed students to mark their responses on a five-point, Likert-type scale on Part I (Meaning of Work) of the instrument. Students indicated their work value orientations by marking their preferences for each of the value statements on Part II (Value of Work) of the instrument. Group demographics for the subjects were: male, N=181; female, N=127; black, N=228; white, N=80; disadvantaged, N=207; and nondisadvantaged, N=101. Students were classified as academically disadvantaged if their overall grade point average was less than a

2.0 (A=4.0) and they were two or more grade levels behind their age group.

Design

The study utilized an ex post facto design. The three independent variables were gender, ethnic group, and academic status. The two dependent variables were the scores on Part 1 of the MVWS (meaning of work) and the scores on Part 11 of the MVWS (value of work). The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) statistical procedure was applied to the three independent and two dependent variables.

Instrumentation

The Meaning and Value of Work Scale (MVWS), a two-part instrument developed by Kazanas, Hannah, and Gregor (1975) was used to collect the data for this study. The MVWS is an appropriate instrument to measure a broad array of work perceptions and work values of high school students. Items on the MVWS permitted the depth and breath necessary to serve present research purposes. Part I is a 40-item summated rating scale designed to measure an individual's perception of the term "work." A high score on the meaning of work means that one perceives work in a broad sense. That is, work is viewed as a multi-faceted phenomena. The converse is true for a low score. That is, work is viewed in a narrow sense. Part II consists of 42 dichotomously paired statements reflecting an individual's work value orientation. A high score on the value of work means that one values work intrinsically, whereas a low score indicates extrinsic

work values. Reliability coefficients of .91 and .80 were reported by Kazanas et al. (1975) for Part I and Part II of the MVWS respectively. Content validity (Kazanas et al., 1975) was established by a panel of judges. Kazanas et al. (1975) have not published norms for the MVWS. However, norms for students similar to those in the present sample were calculated by Kraska (1990). Distributions for the current and earlier samples do not appear to be radically different.

Findings

Results of this study are presented on the basis of the research question:

For high school students, to what extent are there differences (a) in perceptions of work and (b) work value orientations based on gender (male and female), ethnic group (black and white), and academic status (disadvantaged or nondisadvantaged)?

The statistical design required a MANOVA analysis for the Table 1 means assembled into centroids for testing with PROC GLM of SAS. Two MANOVA sources produced Type I significant Wilks' Lambdas: gender (prob > 0.0001) and ethnic group (prob > 0.0513). The third source: academic status, generated a Wilks' Lambda of 0.996 with an associated prob > 0.5699.

Insert Table 1 about here

Wilks' lambda is the multiple dependent variable analog of the F-ratio in the single dependent variable case. The primary difference between the two is that lambda is concerned with matrices of values while the F-ratio is concerned with single values. Both are ratios. For lambda, the ratio is between two determinants (generalized variances): between the determinant representing the pooled within-groups sum of products matrix, and the determinant representing the matrix sum of pooled within-groups and between-groups matrices. If Wilks' lambda is sufficiently small (that is, sufficiently close to zero on a scale lying between zero and one), the hypothesis that multivariate centroids vary from each other only by chance can be rejected.

Univariate analyses of Meaning of Work and Value of Work are presented in Table 2. Gender is a significant source for both variables with females scoring significantly higher on both parts of the MVWS. Ethnic group is a significant source for Meaning of Work with black students having the larger mean indicating a broader perception of work than white students.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion and Implications

Vocational education is charged with the responsibility to prepare individuals for job requirements consistent with those most desired by employers. Starr, Fraser, and Russell (1988) suggested that vocational programs should emphasize employability skills as well as occupational skills and basic skills. Job requirements are becoming more broadly defined to include not only task-oriented activities, but also personal attitudes and behaviors that equip workers for successful employment. Miller and Coady (1986) stated that students should receive instruction to help them develop enabling work ethics. A primary objective of enabling work ethics is to provide instruction that helps students participate in the labor market as responsible workers.

Results of this study indicated females scored significantly higher than males on meaning of work and value of work. This finding suggests that typical females tend to endorse broader perceptions of work and more intrinsic work values than males. One explanation for this phenomenon may be that females are more socialized to accept broader perceptions of work and intrinsic work values deemed as appropriate employability attributes. Black students may be exposed to a greater variety of work situations at an earlier age than white students; thus, black students may accommodate broader perceptions of work.

Counselors, placement personnel, and teachers should be aware of differences in work perceptions and work values of males and females when selecting instructional materials to teach a broad

range of work perceptions and values. Nunez and Russell (1982) suggested that vocational educators involve employers in planning and evaluating programs to assure that employer needs are addressed. Elder (1987) stated that successful cooperative industry-education programs inevitably involve the teaching of values. In addition, research should be conducted to further identify specific areas of differences between males and females to assess the type of curricular experiences and instructional strategies that enhance students' perceptions of work and work value orientations. For example, Kraska (1990) found no significant difference on the value of work between males and females who were disadvantaged. McGough and Kazanas (1979) found that subjects who were black and disadvantaged were significantly more intrinsically work oriented than their nondisadvantaged counterparts.

No significant differences resulted from the comparison between disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged students. However, earlier studies (Kraska, 1990; McGough & Kazanas, 1979) revealed that females who were disadvantaged had a broader perception of the meaning of work than males who were disadvantaged. No differences may in fact exist. On the other hand, the MVWS may not be sensitive enough to measure subtle differences between disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged high school students.

Data collected from the MVWS, however, should be interpreted with caution. While significant differences were computed in the foregoing results, those differences may not be considered by

thoughtful educators and counselors to be definitively meaningful for practical applications. Therefore, school personnel should use other measures of work perceptions and work value orientations in reinforcement of findings from the MVWS. For example, simulated classroom exercises as well as teacher observations may be useful in assessing students' perceptions of work and work value orientations. Although successful worker attributes is often an elusive topic that elicits mixed responses from various individuals and groups, vocational educators should provide opportunities for students to recognize, develop, and practice desirable work values for future applications.

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Table 1

Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Minimum and Maximum Values of MVWS by Comparison Groups

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Meaning of Work					
Male	181	151.64	15.38	94	200
Female	127	159.50	12.95	109	189
Disadv	207	155.71	12.99	113	187
Nondisadv	101	153.19	18.20	94	200
Black	228	156.17	14.07	109	200
White	80	151.22	16.66	94	183
Total	308	154.88	14.92	94	200
Value of Work					
Male	181	20.71	4.82	10	36
Female	127	22.50	5.54	6	36
Disadv	207	21.32	5.16	6	36
Nondisadv	101	21.69	5.29	10	36
Black	228	21.45	4.01	6	36
White	80	21.44	5.75	10	36
Total	308	21.44	5.20	6	36

Table 2

Univariate Analysis of Variance for Meaning of Work and Value of Work Scores

Dependent Variable:		Meaning of Work				Value of Work			
Source	df	SS	MS	F	Pr > F	SS	MS	F	Pr > F
Model	3	5839	1946	9.46	0.0001	248.8	82.94	3.13	0.0261
Error	305	62742	205.7			8091	26.53		
Total	308	68581				8339			
		R**2	C.V	RMSE	Mean	R**2	C.V	RMSE	Mean
		0.085	9.26	14.34	154.8	0.030	24.04	5.15	21.4
Source	df	SS	MS	F	Pr > F	SS	MS	F	Pr > F
Gender	1	3972	3972	19.31	0.0001	238.6	238.6	8.99	0.0029
Ethnic	1	1232	1232	5.99	0.0149	2.18	2.18	< 1.0	------
Academic	1	38.06	38.06	< 1.0	------	23.94	23.94	< 1.0	------